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ABSTRACT

While numerous journal articles have praised student broadcast internships as a way for universities to provide "practical" experience rather than just academic training for future jobs, internships are also problematic for students and instructors in many ways. When students work for a particular radio or television station, they learn the practices of that station, sometimes with inadequate grounding in theory. Consequently, the ideas a student brings back from an internship often conflict with what is taught in courses, and students may later be unprepared to adapt to the working procedures in a different station. Moreover, intern labor is often unpaid, the interns working only for the experience in hopes of obtaining a job after graduation. Professors, too, are often overloaded in supervising internships because such duties are frequently added to a normal teaching load with no extra compensation. Since universities generally cannot afford the equipment necessary to make university training helpful to the student, and since students do need practical training in the field of broadcasting, internships are probably necessary, but they should not be the most important type of training universities offer to students. Rather internships, and the journal articles that extol them, should be examined with a healthy skepticism. (JC)

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The Trouble with Internships

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The Trouble with Internships

"The academic problem is the following: how to teach what is practical and yet not make the university a trade school." (Paul Goodman, The Community of Scholars)[1]

As part of my first teaching job, I was required to "teach" (i.e. supervise) internships in radio and television.[2] This was one of the least enjoyable parts of my job, but I tried to do it well. After two years, I thought I was doing so well that I should tell other teachers how to do well, so I presented a convention paper that explained my procedures. Since then I have discovered at least a dozen articles and papers virtually identical to mine in tone, and quite similar in matters of scope and detail.[3] For the most part, they explain, as mine did, how wonderful internships are and how to make them even more wonderful. Even the (rare) negatively shaded articles tend to accept the usual premises of internship programs and complain only about problems of implementation.[4]

I still believe internships are wonderful in a certain way. I was a Radio-TV undergraduate before the internship boom of the 1970s, so I never took an internship. As far as I know, the school I attended had no internship class. Having been unemployed and underemployed after graduating from college, I am quite sympathetic to the heavy emphasis many of my students place on vocational preparation. And I have supervised enough internships to know that people who do internships get jobs they wouldn't have a chance to get otherwise. In that respect, internships are wonderful.

In addition, I believe it is absolutely essential for college teachers to listen to their students. These are the people we most directly serve. If they want internships, we should give them internships.

But as I looked over my old convention paper recently with hopes of getting it published, I found myself choking on sugar. It got worse as I read the other articles and papers I had accumulated on internships. It wasn't just that they all said the same, glowing things. Reading the articles chronologically, it was clear that what had been a bandwagon in 1975 had become a steamroller by 1980, with recommendations that internships should be required of all students, that faculty members should make frequent visits to all work sites, and that all interns should be paid.[5]

Work sites, mostly broadcast stations in my experience, gain the status of holy places to which teachers should make frequent pilgrimages. With internships required of every student, the pilgrimages could keep a faculty member busy full-time. While such an arrangement would help establish broadcast internships as professional training on the order of student teaching (except that student teachers don't get paid), the question of broadcasters' ability to provide the right kind of training must be raised. Buried within one of the 1975 articles on internships is an objection raised by one intern, and repeated nowhere else in the literature I have read: "[P]ractitioners emphasize current practice rather than the way things should be . . ."[6]

But of course! The student who works at station WXXX is going to learn how things are done at WXXX. The lower level employee who supervises interns at WXXX is going to teach interns that the way things are done is the way things should be done. Most internships provide indoctrination, not a forum for inquiry. The intern's indoctrination can become an issue in the classroom if the intern subsequently takes a class in the same subject as the internship. Several former interns have quarreled with me about such matters as writing style and production procedures. In these cases, I thought I was trying to teach "the way things should be," or even merely one possible way for things to be. The former interns

were, of course, operating from the standpoint of a "current practice" which somehow precludes alternatives.

At issue here is not only how things should be, but also who should be believed about the way things should be and who should get to determine the way things are. Unlike the case of student teaching, there are no minimum qualifications for internship supervisors (or for any other broadcasting personnel, with the exception of engineers who must be licensed, which, thanks to deregulation, no longer means much). By sending students to learn broadcasting at WXXX, the university is "farming out" instruction to somebody with uncertain qualifications. This person will undoubtedly have more professional broadcasting experience than a university professor, but less education. In the sacrifice of the "ivory tower" for the "real world," what is most likely to be lost is concern for excellence as an end in itself rather than as a technical means ultimately subservient to the "bottom line."

In this and many other ways, broadcast education reproduces the business structure of the industry. Since a rampantly commercialized system is "current practice," an internship is not normally the place where a student will be encouraged to develop a critique of advertising, ratings, celebrities, programs, station bureaucracy, labor policy, or the station's adherence to the public interest standard. Presumably the student's academic studies will foster some such critique, but this is certainly not guaranteed, and in any case the critics back at the university have tough ideological competition in the professional broadcaster.

The student likes radio and TV in the first place--that is why he or she majored in it. Criticism is not necessarily welcome. The university may have something of a sacred feeling, but a broadcasting station, with its aura of magic, is both a more fun and a more authoritative place. When the intern

bumps into the famous dj or news anchor walking down the hall, it is a far more uncanny and impressive experience than a chance encounter with a professor. Likewise, the experience of working at a broadcast station is more authentic to the student than whatever hypotheticals and laboratory exercises the university is able to provide.

The matter of the broadcaster's rhetorical and pedagogical authority vis-à-vis the professor's is but one "pixil" in a larger picture sketched by Paul Goodman:

> We start with the fact that there are professions and tasks in the world that require learning, and they are performed by men. We make an abstraction from the performance of these men; those who can meet these "standards" will be licensed. We then copy off the license requirements as the curricula and departments of schools; and we man the departments with academic teachers. Naturally, at so many removes, the students do not take the studies for real; so we then import veterans from outside to pep things up! Would it not be more plausible to omit the intervening steps and have the real professionals do the teaching? But they don't know anything, they are narrow practitioners. Of course they don't, of course they are! They are not the faculty of a <u>studium generale</u>.
>
> For the sake of <u>both</u> the university and the professions, the professionals must return and assume responsibility for the history and humanity of their arts by taking real places again on the faculty of the university. Responsible teaching of the young is always teaching of the more ideal, for the young must transform practice in the world. If the young are free, they will not put up with narrow practical teaching; it's too boring; it's not worth studying; they ask far-reaching and

embarrassing questions. On the other hand, only real practice is believable and authoritative.

> At present, there is no philosophy of medicine, no jurisprudence, and no social theory of engineering [and no philosophy of broadcasting]. The social consequences are disastrous.[7]

While it does not deal directly with internships, this passage by Goodman is germane because it addresses the schism between theory and practice which plagues media education. Goodman's suggestion to "have the real professionals do the teaching" has actually become an important doctrine in broadcast pedagogy especially, as manifested not only in student internships, but also in faculty internships and in the use of broadcasting professionals as adjunct faculty, guest lecturers, and advisory board members. To the extent that American broadcasting is ideologically diverse, the osmosis into the academy of professional doctrine can be a democratizing and invigorating influence. Unfortunately, the ideology of broadcasting in the United States is predictable and rather unanimous. There are many stations one might characterize as ideologically "off center" (religious, educational, community-supported, foreign language, etc.), but they are in most cases financially weak, not highly visible, and not highly sought after for internships or other university connections.

The ideological edge of internships has in any event dulled from the days when they emerged as one answer to the problem of lack of "relevance" in university studies. Such Sixties-type institutions as International Community College, Vocations for Social Change, and the Lorenzo Milam radio stations do not seem to have left much of a legacy of opportunity for alternative internships, especially in broadcasting. Public access cable is an option, but it is, in its own way, "not real" in the eyes of students. Goodman's proposal in Compulsory Mis-Education that youth of high school age assist "in the thousands of little

theaters, independent broadcasters, and local newspapers, that we need to countervail the mass-media . . .[8] seems more utopian now than when he made it in 1964.

The perceived need to separate students from the normal flow of campus life in order to receive stimulation or a dose of "reality" underscores the general impotence and out-to-lunch status of university broadcasting. Whereas in most fields we expect universities to be somewhere near the "cutting edge," in broadcasting we generally expect either narcissistic amateurism (student stations poorly imitating commercial stations) or boredom floating through the ether (instructional or highbrow cultural programming presented by staff professionals, i.e. not by the faculty). These are, of course, caricatures, but I believe my generalization is basically valid.

Where is the "cutting edge" in radio and television? Perhaps at some video artist's studio, or at a pirate radio station off the coast of New York, or on the set of David Letterman's show, or Max Headroom, or Molly Dodd, or even at NPR and PBS. But definitely not at a university, except occasionally when the student station does something outlandish (which will be stopped sooner or later by the administration).

The "creative research" encouraged, or at least tolerated, in academic programs in music, art, theatre, photography, and film, is a marginal entity in radio and television departments. The M.F.A. degree is rare in radio and television, and so are positions which require it. Anyone, M.F.A. or otherwise, who is serious about doing creative work in radio or TV will be hard pressed to find a suitable university job, especially one that will provide high quality equipment; production budgets; support to keep current on equipment and technique; time to air work on the campus radio or TV station; entrée to NPR, PBS, or other national syndication; and (most importantly) a favorable tenure decision.

With no work of renown or audacity being done at the university station, no wonder students crave the kind of authentic experience an internship appears to offer. And with internships offering the "real world," student stations offering fun and a degree of autonomy, and university/NPR/PBS stations offering "safely splendid" programming (to use Erik Barnouw's phrase[9]), the only thing missing from college broadcasting is the main thing, namely any kind of support structure for challenging, innovative, creative work in radio and TV. Universities long ago abdicated the leadership position they should occupy in broadcasting. By now it seems natural for college broadcasting to be backward and dull. The routine nature of off-campus internships perpetuates the second-class status of campus experience. People assume, of course the campus station is not the "real world," of course the university cannot afford state-of-the-art equipment, of course the faculty are not among the leading people in radio and TV practice.

Internships are now so important as "capstone" experiences and in job placement that they represent a significant decentralization of higher education, away from universities. Whatever their virtues may be, internships contribute to what Bowles and Gintis called the "fragmenting" of "the cultural unity of the college community."[10] This fragmentation, in turn, is one plank in a policy strategy promoted especially from 1967 to 1973 by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, aimed at "the restructuring of higher education to meet the needs of stable capitalist expansion."[11]

The way fragmentation of cultural unity supposedly works in this strategy is to key on students' differences, primarily those of class which destine some to be leaders and others followers. At the macro level, leaders gravitate toward places like the Ivy Leage, followers toward someplace like the local two-year college, with its more vocationally oriented curriculum. Although the Harvard

student and the junior college student are both "going to college," they are part of a common nationwide "community" of college students only in an insignificant way.

In the case of internships, students temporarily absent themselves from the college community and develop ties to a universe with a completely different intellectual and political outlook. Then, in most cases, the student returns to the university for a semester or two, as a changed person, no longer a comfortable fit in the common culture. The social stratification and shakeout effect that are both a cause and consequence of our policies on admissions, grading, Latin honors, etc., have their counterpart in internships. The good, or lucky, or assertive, or well placed students get the best internships, and then the best jobs. Radio and TV are collective enterprises, moreso than most activities. Yet we send people as individuals to numerous and farflung places for internships. Thus we displace students not only from the cultural life of the university, but from the specific culture of radio and television activity on campus. The effect of this may be major or minor depending on the case, but as a general phenomenon the placement of large numbers of interns into professional broadcasting situations raises questions about the proper role of the university in broadcast education.

Assuming we can designate the university or college as <u>the</u> societally authorized, responsible, and accountable institution for the conduct of higher education in the United States, one might reasonably ask the question, why should a university offer internships? On the one hand, internships are a considerate accommodation of the needs and interests of students. However, in another sense internships are one more abdication on the part of the university.

The university has nothing really to offer in an internship, other than its services as a broker--and this, of course, is exactly what it is selling.

Viewed in economic terms, an internship is a three-way trade in which, at first glance, nobody loses. The university receives tuition money and, with occasional exceptions, provides practically nothing in return. The station or other organization receives free or cheap labor and in return provides supervision which seldom costs the station much. The student receives a "valuable learning experience," makes contacts, gets credit for a class, and possibly gets a job.

Who loses in this transaction? The answer will vary from case to case, but in most instances the chances are good that someone's labor is being exploited. The most obvious "someone" is the student. In the first place, most of the student's reward is intangible (e.g. learning) or only potential (e.g. the chance of getting a job someday). There is always the possibility that the job at the end of the internship rainbow will not materialize. Some interns are paid, usually at an entry level rate or less. Anyone who teaches an internship course hears occasional, if not frequent, complaints from students that stations use interns for "gofer" work, do not provide enough training and supervision, or have interns doing work, for no pay or low pay, that highly skilled or experienced employees would normally do (which, of course, makes the displaced employee another loser in some internships).

The university also benefits from the intern's labor, in that the student pays the university for the opportunity to work someplace else. The normal student-university transaction is that the student pays (or arranges for somebody else to pay) and the faculty member teaches. The university bureaucracy acts as a broker to bring student and faculty member together. In an internship, the faculty member assumes a bureaucratic function, bringing student and station together. Often the faculty member actually does very little to set up an internship. The student does the work, the station provides the instruction, and the faculty member collects, examines, and signs sheets of paper. This

paperwork is extremely time consuming, is of little value to the student, and in many cases serves no function other than to justify the student's grade. Since the student has contact with the station but not with the teacher, the teacher, in order to figure out what grade to give the student, must rely on objectives, diaries, student evaluations, supervisor evaluations, and other absurd documents.

The faculty member may do an exemplary job of handling these documents, or a terrible job. In my experience, it doesn't matter--the faculty member is never seriously evaluated, by anyone, for doing a good or bad job on internships. Presumably most teachers try to do a good job, in which case they are losers because they receive no reward. Rewards are given primarily for doing (i.e. publishing) research and for teaching real courses. Unfortunately, it is impossible to do research or teach while one is shuffling internship documents. In some cases, internships must even be taught as overloads--that is, the teacher must teach the usual number of courses, plus internships, for no extra compensation.

Internships are on-the-job training. The need for such training in broadcasting is legitimate, but the rationale for the university "providing" it is unclear. Actually, of course, the university does not provide much of anything, it merely sanctions training at the station by offering course credit for it. The problem with following the more sensible policy of eliminating the university middleman would be that either the entry level college graduate would have to work for free or the station would have to pay the inexperienced graduate an entry level salary and provide training designed for a permanent employee. The student and station both come out better economically, at least in the short term, with the university lending its prestige (but no substance) to a training procedure that is essentially a nonacademic enterprise.

To be nonacademic is sinful in the ideology of universities, which is what prompts faculty members to take on extra hours of unrewarded work to make internships academic, or at least look academic. Internships as students and stations view them are much like cooperative education of the kind found in high schools and junior colleges. University faculty members lean more toward the inflated view of an internship as field research in the sociology of mass media organizations. This is the view which lies behind such internship requirements as term papers, reading assignments, and post-internship seminar sessions. My experience has been that students resent these requirements, even though they may benefit from them. Students think internships should be like jobs, not like classes.

The nonacademic nature of internships affects the faculty member in another, subtle way. Teaching a real class forces a faculty member to grapple with subject matter. The teacher should learn more and more about his or her discipline as a result of <u>teaching</u> (in addition to whatever research he or she may be doing). Through learning more and more, the teacher should become more skillful and mature, both as a teacher and researcher. Internships have no subject matter from the teacher's point of view. Time spent teaching internships is not time spent growing intellectually.

The student also pays an intellectual price for taking an internship. Since an internship is defined by the university as a course, the student who takes an internship takes one less real course, or in some cases one less term's worth of courses. Furthermore it is often possible for a student to compound this substitute curriculum by taking a second internship, practicum courses, independent study, internships offered by other departments, etc. In evening programs and the like, some students may also receive course credit for life experience. Regardless of the good intentions which give rise to this kind

of education, the university defaults on its responsibility when it "farms out" teaching to such an extent. Nor should the economic dimension of this be overlooked. For every enrollment in an internship course, there is less demand for a real course, but the university collects the same amount of money. If a sufficient number of students, say 30, sign up for an internship in a given semester, it may be possible to get by with one less section of a real course, which will probably save the university some money--at least a part-timer or TA's salary. If it also happens that the internships are being "taught" on an overload basis by the regular faculty, so much the better, economically speaking, for the university--and so much the worse for the faculty.

Conclusion

Having been so polemical, let me now retreat to that haven of moderation, the "real world." I do recommend internships to my students. It would be irresponsible to do otherwise. Nor do I mope about students' desire to get away from the university--I often feel the same way myself! My dissent in this paper is rather against the platitudes which pour forth in the pages of our professional journals, like so many Have-a-Nice-Day buttons off the assembly line. (And here again I readily admit my own participation in what I am now complaining about.) Yes, there are many good things about internships. Yes, internships are here to stay. Yes, we should do them as well as we can.

But internships are not, or at least should not be, the most important thing we do. When a former intern says "My internship did more for me than any course in my entire college career"[12] (and I believe this is a common sentiment), something is wrong. If internships are <u>that</u> good, we might as well offer four years of internships, and skip the "college career." A world in which people believe a university's most valuable function is performed elsewhere than at the university, is a world out of balance--whether the belief is true

or not. This problem needs to be attacked from all angles, naturally. My present, modest proposal is that we reconsider internships with the same degree of healthy skepticism we apply to anything else that is too good to be true.

Notes

[1] Paul Goodman, The Community of Scholars (1962; rpt. with Compulsory Mis-Education as Compulsory Mis-Education and The Community of Scholars, New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 318.

[2] My argument will be based heavily on my own experience supervising interns. In addition, I have seen, from a close distance, how others do it at two universities, and will draw from these observations. The internships I am most familiar with are in radio and television, but I hope my remarks will ring true to my colleagues in related disciplines as well.

[3] Examples include: R. Dale Ware [sic--initial should be P.], "Internship Contract Proves Beneficial for All Concerned," Journalism Educator, 30, No. 4 (January 1976), 30-31; Catherine Konsky, "Practical Guide to Development and Administration of an Internship Program: Issues, Procedures, Forms," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, No. 22 (October 1977), 15-28; Fred Fedler and M. Timothy O'Keefe, "Screening Process Upgrades Student Internship Program," Journalism Educator, 32, No. 2 (July 1977), 43-45; P. Dale Ware, "16-Point Checklist Unifies Broadcast Internship Program," Journalism Educator, 32, No. 3 (October 1977), 59-61; Phillip O. Keirstead, "Black University Develops Effective Program of Internships," Feedback, 21, No. 3 (Fall 1979), 8-10; Jeffrey McCall, "Internship Programs in the Heartland," Feedback, 24, No. 4 (Spring 1983), 11-13; Roger Hadley, "Internship Programs Across the Country," Feedback, 24, No. 4 (Spring 1983), 14-16; J. Sean McCleneghan, "The Process and Evaluation of Paid Media Internships," Feedback, 27, No. 1 (Summer 1985), 19-21; Russell H. Mouritsen, "Benefits of a Broadcast Internship Program," Feedback, 27, No. 4 (Spring 1986), 28, 35; R. Wayne Pace, "Running an Intern Program: A Faculty View," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, No. 60 (April 1987), 41-42; and Susan A. Hellweg, "Running an Intern Program: An Administrative

View," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, No. 60 (April 1987), 43-46. A book summarizing the positive view of internships is Lynne Schafer Gross, The Internship Experience (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1981). My original paper has the obnoxious title "Prerequisites, Objectives, Assignments, and Grading in Broadcast Internship Courses," and is available from ERIC (document number ED 277 053).

[4] For example, see William H. Peters, "'Balancing the Record': Internships May Contain Some Unexamined Pitfalls," Journalism Educator, 30, No. 1 (April 1975), 40-42; and Wenmouth Williams Jr. and Catherine Konsky, "Internship Contracts Present Potential Legal Problems," Journalism Educator, 31, No. 3 (October 1976), 50-51.

[5] See especially Women in Communications, Inc., 1980 Survey of College Internship Programs, pamphlet (Austin, TX: Women in Communications, Inc., 1980).

[6] Intern quoted in Peters, "'Balancing the Record,'" 42.

[7] Goodman, The Community of Scholars, pp. 302-303 (Goodman's emphasis).

[8] Paul Goodman, Compulsory Mis-Education (1964; rpt. with The Community of Scholars as Compulsory Mis-Education and The Community of Scholars, New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 151.

[9] Erik Barnouw, quoted in John Weisman, "Public TV in Crisis--Can It Survive?", TV Guide, 1 August 1987, pp. 2-11, quote on p. 3.

[10] Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life (1976; rpt. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), p. 208.

[11] Ibid., p. 206.

[12] Former intern, quoted in Women in Communications, Inc., 1980 Survey of College Internship Programs, unpaginated [p.6].